

OBAMA SHOULD ACT TO OVERTURN STEM CELL RESTRICTIONS BY EXECUTIVE ORDER-- December 22, 2008

Castle and DeGette Lead Bipartisan Group of Stem Cell Advocates to Urge President-Elect Obama to Immediately Overturn President Bush's Restrictions to Stem Cell Research

WASHINGTON – U.S. Reps. Michael N. Castle (R-DE) and Diana DeGette (D-CO), chief architects of legislation expanding stem cell research, led a bipartisan group of legislators today in sending a letter to President-Elect Barack Obama urging him to immediately remove existing federal barriers to embryonic stem cell research by Executive Order upon taking office. Reps. DeGette and Castle recently introduced new stem cell legislation overturning President Bush's Executive Order, updating previous legislation to ensure that it is current with the ever-expanding field of stem cell research, and bringing the National Institutes of Health (NIH) back into the forefront of stem cell research worldwide.

"For the first time in many years the U.S. is poised to reaffirm its commitment to funding a pro-science biomedical research agenda by removing the current restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, which continues to hold so much promise," said Castle. "We have lost valuable time and I look forward to working with President-Elect Obama and Congressional leaders in 2009 to swiftly nullify the current restrictions and finally allow science to flourish."â€

"I am excited that we are on the brink of expanding stem cell research under a responsible, pro-science Administration," said DeGette, Vice Chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "After two vetoes of strong bipartisan legislation that would have overturned President Bush's restrictions, millions of patients and their families can now finally have hope again. I look forward to working with the Obama Administration to develop a robust research agenda in America."

The text of the letter is as follows:

December 19, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama

The Obama & Biden Presidential Transition Project

Washington, DC 20270

Dear President-Elect Obama:

We are writing to respectfully urge that you remove existing federal barriers to embryonic stem cell research early next year. Valuable time has been lost since President Bush's restrictive Directive in 2001 and it is time for the United States to reassert its leadership in biomedical research by fostering a robust stem cell research program.

Science has progressed at a faster pace than any of us could ever have imagined and we remain encouraged by continued progress both in the fields of embryonic stem cell research and adult stem cell research. In the face of fragmented state and private research that is currently being undertaken, we also recognize the need for strong federal leadership by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in carrying out a responsible stem cell research program. Although numerous entities have published guidelines for stem cell research, there is currently no overarching set of federal guidelines to serve as the gold standard. As a result, scientists must constantly worry about meeting a patchwork of ethical requirements. And, with the many recent advances in stem cell techniques, it is imperative we allow all forms of stem cell science to flourish.

Scientists, not politicians, should decide which techniques have the best potential for progress in developing therapies. Your support for removing existing federal barriers to funding and expansion of embryonic stem cell research, and putting in place an overarching federal framework to guide responsible stem cell research is imperative.

We believe that the top priority for both an Executive Order and any complementary legislation must be to immediately revoke the prohibition on federal funding for research involving embryonic stem cell lines derived after August 9, 2001. In addition, we believe that the NIH must establish guidelines for carrying out embryonic stem cell research as well as have the ability to establish guidelines in other areas of stem cell research as scientifically warranted. Guidelines must be issued based on scientific needs and advances with the flexibility to provide periodic updates. In addition, NIH will need to outline a policy for determining eligibility for federal funding of stem cell lines that are already in existence. Recognizing the link between beginning basic scientific research and the potential for eventual clinical trials using stem cell applications, we also believe that the NIH and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) should communicate on this important area of research.

With these elements in mind, Representatives Diana DeGette and Mike Castle recently reworked the original Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (S.5/H.R. 3), and introduced a discussion draft, H.R. 7141. A summary of the legislation and the bill text are attached.

Medical and scientific research, including embryonic stem cell research, holds great promise for alleviating the suffering of the 100 million American patients who are living with devastating diseases—from Parkinson's disease to spinal cord injuries to diabetes—for which there are no good treatments or cures. A strong federal role in carrying out this research is vitally important.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders to drive this issue in the 111th Congress and to working with your Administration to form a robust federal stem cell research policy—one that immediately removes existing federal barriers to funding for embryonic stem cell research and puts in place new scientific and ethical guidelines for the federal funding of such research. We look forward to continued discussions on your plans for an Executive Order and also sharing with you our plan for corresponding legislation in 111th Congress. Thank you, again, for your support.

Sincerely,

/s

Diana DeGette (D-CO)

Michael Castle (R-DE)

Mary Bono Mack (R-CA)

Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

Charles Dent (R-PA)

Russ Carnahan (D-MO)

Lois Capps (D-CA)

Mark Kirk (R-IL)

Henry Waxman (D-CA)

Ed Perlmutter (D-CO)

Fred Upton (R-MI)

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